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ABSTRACT

Recognizing that parents are their children's first teachers and that their parenting style can influence educational experiences, this study used an ethnographic approach to evaluate the impact on parent-child interaction of the parent education component of the South Dakota Head Start/Public School Transition Project. The demonstration group was composed of children and families who received comprehensive Head Start-like services in addition to educational services, and the comparison group consisted of children and families who received only educational services. Eight family service coordinators maintained routine contacts with families and schools and provided services directly to families or through referrals to other agencies. Comprehensive services included health, parent involvement, social, and educational services related to transition from preschool to the public elementary school. Parents whose children attended demonstration schools received parent education through individual instruction, videotapes, books, pamphlets, or classes, either Systematic Training for Effective Parenting, Active Parenting, or 1-2-3 Magic. Data were collected in the spring of each year since 1993 from 200 of the 425 children in 2 cohorts who have received services. Data were also collected through structured interviews and participant observation while shadowing the family service coordinator. Results indicated that family service coordinators have been instrumental in increasing parent and child interactions. Parents have attended parenting classes and as a result have improved communication with their children. Parents have also become more involved in their children's education. Implications of increased parent involvement and improved communication include higher self-esteem and increased educational success for children. (Contains about 60 references.) (KB)

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Successful Methods for Increasing and Improving Parent and Child Interactions

Paper Presented at the National Head Start Association
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Abstract

Comprehensive Head Start-like services have been provided in six different South Dakota schools through implementation of the South Dakota Head Start/Public School Transition Demonstration Project. In 1993 an ethnographic evaluation began generating data. Results indicate that family service coordinators have been instrumental in increasing parent and child interactions. Parents have attended parenting classes and as a result have improved communication with their children. Parents have also have become more involved in their children's educational experiences. Implications of increased parent involvement and improved communication include higher self-esteem and increased educational success for the children.

Successful Methods for Increasing and Improving Parent and Child Interactions

As children's first and foremost teachers, parents have a most critical role. Few are adequately prepared for their role, however, and use parenting techniques that are merely survival strategies. Carlson noted that few people take on occupational roles without adequate preparation (1990). What do parents do who want to prepare for their roles?

Historically most societies have handed down childrearing advice from generation to generation. With grandparents of today located many miles away or working full-time, parents seek help in other directions. According to the research, many parents search out parenting education (Allen, 1996; Carlson, 1990; Gleason, 1993; Main, 1986; Rogers Wiese, 1992). Interest in parenting education has proliferated as demonstrated by the numerous parenting self-help books which line bookstore shelves. Some books offer simple answers, others seem to confuse parents.

Parents with low incomes encounter additional stresses which can cause parents to exhibit harsh, unresponsive behavior toward their children. The children respond, according to McLeod and Shanahan (1993), with symptoms such as antisocial behavior, anxiety or depression, hyperactivity, dependency, peer conflict or withdrawal, and headstrong behavior.

Research has demonstrated that parenting styles are correlated with children's achievement in school (Dekovic & Janssens, 1992; Grolnick & Ryan, 1989; Shaefer,

1991; Vach & McLaughlin, 1992; Vickers, 1994; Waugh, Bireley, Webb, & Graham 1993). According to Schaefer (1991), parental beliefs and values which influence parenting styles were correlated with parent education, child intelligence test scores, and teacher ratings of child competence. Other researchers suggested that democratic parenting styles were important to children's achievement and competence in school and that parents who spent more quality time with their children produced more highly motivated and higher-ability children (Brosz, 1988; Dekovic & Janssens, 1992; Gleason, 1993; Grolnick & Ryan, 1989; Pizzo, 1993; Waugh, et al., 1993).

Quality time and discourse between parents and children were the subjects of a study by Allen in 1996. Allen's "Parent Talk" theory described a sub-category called "role talk" which characterized the conversation between parents and children. Communication and interactions between parents and children had improved tremendously after the parents had attended parenting classes. The parents began listening more closely to their children and began using "I" messages.

Another area of quality parent-child interactions is the involvement of parents/caregivers in their children's educational experiences. Parent involvement has been noted in the effective schools literature as a crucial element in children's academic achievement (Epstein, 1995; Funk & Brown, 1996; Griffith, 1996; Huffman, Benson, Gebelt, & Phelps, 1996; Keith, T. Z., Keith, P. B., Quirk, Cohen-Rosenthal, & Franzese, 1996; Mantzicopoulos & Neuharth-Pritchett, 1996; Moore & Brown, 1996; Rogers Tracy, 1995; Rosenthal & Young Sawyers, 1996; Sanders, 1996; Thompson,

1996; Vacha & McLaughlin, 1992; Vickers, 1994; Zeldin, 1990). The National Education Goals 2000 support the effective schools research and recognize the important role of parents. As stated in the most recent National Education Goals Report, "No classroom teacher will ever have a greater influence on children's learning than their first teachers, their parents" (National Education Goals Panel, 1995, p. 158).

NTP as Context

Head Start, a preschool program that has provided comprehensive services to children and families for over thirty years, has recently been expanded into selected elementary schools through implementation of the National Head Start/Public school Early Childhood Transition Demonstration Project (NTP). In September of 1991, the Administration for Children, Youth, and Families (ACYF) awarded thirty-one grants to community based consortiums. The consortiums were responsible for designing and implementing approaches that would successfully support children and families as they left Head Start and began their early elementary (kindergarten to third grade) experience. The consortium partners are a local Head Start agency, local education agencies, and a local higher education institution.

In accordance with the Federal Register, each NTP site selected two groups of participants: (a) a demonstration group composed of children and families who receive comprehensive Head Start-like services in addition to the educational services provided by their local education agency, and (b) a comparison group

composed of children and families who receive only the educational services provided by their local education agency (ACYF, 1991). The NTP is testing the hypothesis that providing continuous comprehensive services to former Head Start children as they move from kindergarten through third grade will maintain and enhance the early benefits attained by the Head Start children and their families (Kennedy, 1993). A second cohort of kindergarten children was added in the fall of 1993, and at the present, Cohort II children are in the third grade.

SDTP as Context

South Central Child Development, Inc., which provides Head Start services to children and families in a sixteen county area in south central South Dakota, is the grantee for the Head Start/Public School Early Childhood Transition Demonstration Project (SDTP) within the state. Consortium partners are nine local education agencies located throughout the South Central Child Development, Inc. (SCCD) service area and the University of South Dakota's Educational Research and Service Center. The Educational Research and Service Center (ERSC) conducts independent evaluation of the SDTP through a contractual agreement with SCCD. Of the nine local education partners, four school districts are SDTP demonstration sites only, three districts are comparison sites only, and two serve as both demonstration and comparison sites.

The SDTP sites are located primarily in rural nonadjacent counties. Butler Flora et al. (1992) defined rural and nonadjacent counties as counties that do not have places of 2,500 or more population and are not adjacent to a metropolitan

county. Two South Dakota sites are located in less urbanized nonadjacent counties. Less urbanized nonadjacent counties are counties with an urban population of 2,555 to 19,999 and not adjacent to a metropolitan county (Butler Flora et al., 1992). The majority of the population are Caucasian Americans (60%-75%) with Native American children and families the majority of the remainder (20%-35%). About one-fourth of the families in the area could be identified as low-income recipients, and single parents head about one-third of the households.

The elementary schools vary in size and composition of students. Some schools include pre-school through high school, some are only kindergarten through fifth grade, and some have primarily Native American students. School sizes range from about 100 students to about 600. On the average, about 225 Cohort I students have received services and about 200 Cohort II students continue to receive SDTP comprehensive services. Of the children enrolled in the SDTP, 110 Cohort I and 90 Cohort II students are part of the NTP Core Data Set. The NTP Core Data Set was collected in the fall and the spring on the kindergarten year and has been collected in the spring of the first, second, and third grade year.

Comprehensive Services as Context

Comprehensive Head Start-like services are provided to SDTP demonstration participants by eight family service coordinators (FSCs). The FSCs provide the services either through referrals to local and regional agencies or through direct service. The FCSs maintain routine contacts with families and schools in an effort to improve communication between homes and schools, help families gain access

to needed resource/service agencies, assist teachers/administrators to develop relationships with service providers, and provide other support as needed and/or possible that will allow parents/caregiver to enhance their role in their children's school experience. All the comprehensive services are provided at no cost to the demonstration families participating in the SDTP. During the 1996-1997 school year, limited social services have been extended to include at-risk students outside of Cohort II. The at-risk students are usually referred to the FSCs by principals, teachers, or counselors.

Delineation and descriptions of the comprehensive services are taken from the Head Start Transition Project Parent Handbook (South Central Child Development, Inc. 1996). The comprehensive services can be broken down into the following four components:

1. The health component consists of vision, hearing, and growth assessment screenings, biennial physical exams, assessments of children's immunization status, support for bringing immunizations up-to-date, dental exams and limited follow-up appointments, mental health consultations (when deemed appropriate or necessary), and nutrition. The nutrition component is subdivided into assessment of children's dietary habits and dietician referral if necessary, provision of milk to children in the demonstration site classrooms, and limited dollars for actual developmental appropriate "hands-on" food activities in the classroom.

2. The parent involvement component is comprised of (a) monthly home visits which focus on meeting the needs of the families, (b) family support plans

which are developed based on needs assessments, (c) monthly parent meetings, (d) involvement of parents on SDTP governing board, (e) locating resources to meet family needs, (f) resource information provided to parents at home visits, and (g) encouraging the cooperative relationship between parents/caregivers and schools.

3. The social service component, while smaller in scope than the other components, is of vital importance to families at or near the poverty level. The component consists of providing resources guides/materials, and assisting parents/caregivers in locating needed resources.

4. The education component consists of the transfer of information from Head Start to the public schools (with parents'/caregivers' permission), training teachers in the use of developmentally appropriate classroom practices (DAPs), and transition plan development which includes teachers, parents, and FSCs.

Theoretical Framework

This paper uses both the "I" voice of the ethnographer as well as the "We" voice of the co-authors. The use of "active voice," "first person," and "present tense," are consistent with ethnographic research (Adler, P. A. & Adler, P., 1994; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Greene & McClintock, 1991; Hess, 1992; Janesick, 1994; LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, 1984; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Spradley, 1979, 1980; Worthen & Sanders, 1991).

The process of program implementation in South Dakota as well as the problems and solutions to those problems are issues we are concerned with. A phenomenological perspective will help us to understand the experiences of the

actors (families and school personnel) involved in the SDTP. Understanding the experiences will provide insight into what the SDTP means to families and teachers. Interpretivism maintains that human phenomena can best be understood as social constructions of meaning (Greene & McClintock, 1991). "One individual's perceptions of meaning in a given setting is likely to differ from another's, and representing both is needed for an understanding of the whole" (Greene & McClintock, 1991, p. 14). Understanding the meanings participants from different SDTP sites attach to certain events will help us to understand the experiences of all the participants as a whole.

Ethnography has been chosen as the framework because of its holistic approach. The "whole view" will help understand the intended and unintended consequences of various interaction patterns occurring as a result of SDTP implementation. According to the research, ethnography can offer implicit or explicit explanations to account for interaction patterns (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Fetterman, 1989; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1992; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Spradley, 1979, 1980). Greene and McClintock (1991) and Knapp (1995) suggest that comprehensive collaborative services for children and families should be studied within an ethnographic framework. Greene and McClintock (1991) proposed that the problems of previous Head Start research arose from the quantitative methodologies and the narrow focus on IQ and academic achievement. Multifaceted programs such as Head Start and the SDTP vary across settings and benefits differ among participants.

Ethnographers are being used more frequently in educational evaluation than they have been used in the past (Greene & McClintock, 1991; Hess, 1992; LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, 1984; Worthen & Sanders, 1991). According to LeCompte and Goetz, the reasons for the increase are due to the growth of educational ethnography and the limitations of quantitative research designs (1982). Hess states that the strength of ethnographic research lies in its descriptions of local situations (1992). Descriptions of policy implementation explain how policies are implemented, why actors in the implementation process are acting as they are, and why policies are or are not successful (Hess, 1992; Peshkin, 1993).

Data Generation

The study described in this paper was designed to provide descriptive and interpretive data on the implementation of the NTP in South Dakota. Data will be used to "explain" or assist in understanding the quantitative results of the NTP Core Data Set. The NTP Core Data Set is comprised of standardized assessments which are administered yearly to the children and the children's parents, teachers, and principals at all thirty-one sites.

Ethnographic data collection techniques, both interactive and noninteractive strategies, are used at the SDTP site. LeCompte and Preissle (1993) describe ethnographic data collection methods as being on a continuum of interactive to noninteractive. Pelto and Pelto define interactive strategies as methods which involve interactions between researcher and participant (1978). Noninteractive methods are less obtrusive and less reactive (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). Interactive

strategies used in the SDTP ethnographic study are participant observations, structured interviewing, and unstructured interviewing. Noninteractive methods used are content analyses of human artifacts.

The structured interviews utilize protocols developed at the SDTP site and are unique to the site. The protocols evoke open-ended responses and are given once yearly to demonstration and comparison participants. Utilizing comparison participants assists in searching for disconfirming evidence. Since only one ethnographer generates the data, the structured interviews help to compare responses across SDTP sites. Firestone and Herriott suggest that using a single investigator and standardized "instruments" increases reliability of the study (1984). The number of people interviewed each year has varied as the SDTP moves through the school system. About 300 structured interviews have been recorded since SDTP implementation.

Unstructured interviews take place as need or opportunity presents itself. Unstructured interviews help clarify what I have observed or define the meaning of events that have taken place in the sites. The interviews are usually recorded as part of the field notes and expanded on after leaving the field.

I spend on the average of two days per week in the field for about two to four months each year "shadowing" FSCs as they go about their work. I shadow the FSCs to learn what they do, how they do it, why they do it, problems they encounter while implementing the SDTP, and solutions they develop for the problems. Participant observations are scheduled in advance and are rarely unannounced, as

recommended by the literature (Agar, 1986; Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Spradley, 1979, 1980). Unscheduled observations are limited to impromptu visits at the schools during the time spent shadowing FSCs. Restricting observations to scheduled visits prevents my knowing a "typical day in the life of a FSC," but it would be impossible to observe the family service coordinators any other way. On an average day, a FSC may visit between eight to ten different homes, numerous community agencies, and one or two schools. It would be next to impossible locate FSCs over the vast sparsely populated area they cover. Several FSCs travel from fifty to one hundred miles round-trip every day.

Sketchy notes are taken during convenient times in the field. Notes are never taken during home visits, because I feel it would be distracting and take away from the conversational quality of the visit. Note taking is also not done during school visits for a number of reasons: (a) I am very often an active participant in the classroom food activities that are presented by FSCs, (b) note taking and preparing food at the same time are impossible, and (c) note taking is distracting to students. My goal is to be as unobtrusive in the classrooms as possible.

One of the times note taking is possible in the field is when I ride with FSCs. As stated earlier, there is a considerable amount of travel time between home and school visits due to the sparse population of South Dakota. The time spent in FSCs' cars traveling between homes, agencies, and institutions allows time to build rapport with FSCs and provides opportunities for spontaneous interviews. The

presence of FSCs allows me to check the accuracy of my observations and meaning assigned to the observations. The field notes are expanded to include descriptions, observations, and personal reflections when I return home.

The collection of artifacts includes journals written by FSCs at my request, written communication between schools and parents/caregivers, printed materials distributed by community agencies, and printed materials distributed by FSCs to families and schools. Journals help provide insight into program implementation and help to understand the perspectives of FSCs.

I use the HyperRESEARCH computer program as a tool to help make sense of the data (Researchware, Inc. 1994). It facilitates data reduction through coding procedures and theory development through the use of bolean statements. Data analysis began with the onset of data collection and is ongoing. Common themes emerge when datum incidents are assigned a descriptive or directional code, as suggested by the literature (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Datum incidents may be as small as one sentence or as large as several paragraphs.

Data are triangulated through multiple data generation methods and multiple data sources. According to the literature, triangulation is useful to discover and corroborate the meaning assigned to lived experiences by the actors (Adler, P. A. & Adler, P., 1994; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Janesick, 1994; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Smith & Robbins, 1984).

Restricted Access

The spread-out nature of the South Dakota site, inclement weather, and graduate student status of the ethnographer have restricted time in the field. I was a graduate student and only able to work part-time on data generation from June, 1993, until the fall of 1996. At that time, I was hired full-time. Multiple data generation methods and length of the study help to compensate for reduced time in the field. I have not been able to move past the "outsider" status in all the communities, especially in the Native American community. Research debates whether one is ever able to gain "insider" knowledge of these communities (Stanfield, 1994).

Perspectives of Co-Authors and Bias Checks

This paper represents the combined efforts of the co-authors. The multi-disciplinary backgrounds of the co-authors enrich the ethnographer's interpretations and serve to check biases of the ethnographer. The disciplinary backgrounds of the co-authors in early-childhood education, elementary education, special education, teacher education, program implementation, and educational evaluation combine with my background in sociology and research to enhance "Verstehen" or understanding (Weber, 1904/1949). As ethnographer, I have been primarily responsible for the design and implementation of the ethnographic study.

I utilize an additional bias check during data generation that is suggested by the literature (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Kirk & Miller, 1986; Spradley, 1979; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). The bias check involves recording my feelings and assumptions as

"observer comments" in a journal. The journal serves to document my thought processes during data generation and helps me to "know" and to "understand" my perspectives, logic, and assumptions.

Results

Parents/caregivers have both increased and improved their interactions with their children. The major interpretation that demonstration parents/caregivers used to account for the changes was the belief that the "Project has helped." There was widespread agreement among the parents/caregivers that by "attending parenting classes" and "doing more things with my kids" they had greatly improved their relationships with their children. All parent names in this paper have been changed to protect their anonymity.

Parent Training

Parents whose children attend demonstration schools have received parent education by the FSCs through a number of different educational formats: (a) one-on-one instructions, (b) video tapes, (c) books, (d) pamphlets, and (e) classes. One-on-one instruction is given as needed, parent education videos are loaned to all who ask for them, all parents receive the 1-2-3 Magic parent education book, during home visits all parents receive pamphlets which help develop parenting skills, and formal parenting classes are offered once yearly in each of the sites. Of all the formats, formal parenting classes have been the most effective in changing parenting practices. Over the course of the SDTP, three different types of parenting

classes have been offered: (a) Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (S.T.E.P.), (b) Active Parenting, and (c) 1-2-3 Magic.

All parents who attended the parenting classes seemed to have enjoyed them. Some parents utilized the courses mainly as a "refresher," while others gained a considerable amount of information from them. Sonja, a parent, said, "I liked them a lot and would go through them again....They made you realize the difference in how you were raised....emphasized the positive instead."

The parents who changed parenting practices improved their communication practices with their children through using non-punitive disciplinary measures, listening to their children, using "I" messages, and offering more choices. In other words, parents became more democratic in their parenting styles. The "story" of Mary will illustrate how parenting classes have helped improve her interactions with her children, and Judy's story illustrates how "taking a refresher" helped her.

Mary's story. Mary, a single parent who is about thirty-five years old and the mother of three children, is one of the parents who changed her parenting practices after attending the parenting classes. Mary enjoyed attending the parenting classes and "learned a lot" from them. She had never taken formal parenting classes before.

When Mary watched the video that accompanied the parenting classes, she had a difficult time understanding, "What is wrong with this picture?" The format of the parenting classes required the parents to read a chapter in their book each week. The topic was presented in a video at the next class. The scenes in the video represented common child-parent interaction problems. An example of one

vignette is a scene in a family's living room. In the scene the son was sitting on the davenport, ignoring his mother's pleas to quit watching t-v and go to bed. The mother repeatedly told the child what to do and the child continued to ignore the mother. The mother responded by yelling and getting angry, and the child reacted by crying and storming off.

Mary said that many of the "don't do this" scenes, such as the example, were things that she experienced at home. She often sat silent during the parenting classes while other parents told the FSC, who was moderating the class, what was wrong in the video. Mary said, "I couldn't see any other way of handling things until we started talking. If they would have just sent the video home and said 'find what they're doing wrong,' I would never have known."

Mary's three children appreciate having a mom who has learned how to "stay cool." Before taking the classes Mary flew off the handle quite easily and frequently yelled at her children. She found that often she could not stop yelling and sometimes seemed to continue yelling just because she was so angry. The children always felt badly after being yelled at and had a difficult time getting over it. As a result of taking the classes, Mary has stopped yelling. Mary discovered that the children have a chance to get over it much quicker when she does not yell. She repeats to herself, "Cool down," and then says to her children, "Lets talk about it." Mary has come a long way and is much happier with herself. Mary even feels that she relates better to other adults now, because of what she learned from the parenting classes.

Judy's story. Judy, a forty-year old mother of two children, had taken child development classes in college and parenting classes seven years ago when she learned that she was pregnant with her oldest daughter. Since then, Judy also took parenting classes offered through her church. She took the parenting classes offered through the SDTP mainly to help refresh what she had learned earlier. Judy believes, "Each time you go through the material something different sticks. You can always learn something different, maybe it's because you are always going through something different. Sometimes it is just helpful learning that other parents are going through the same things." Judy frequently reads parenting books and stays in close contact with her children's teachers. Judy did not change parenting practices but has tended to listen more to her children after attending the parenting classes. Judy said, "Too often parents walk into a situation and form an instant opinion. I think it's important just to sit back and let the stories be told."

Judy believes that parenting is a metamorphosis, because parents and children are always changing and growing up. "Disciplining and parenting are an evolving process; you have to continually reassess how you are communicating with your children," stated Judy. She added, "What works one day may not work the next, so you have to be on your toes."

All the parents who were interviewed agreed with Judy and Mary that "parenting is scary" and that "parents who have had parenting classes are better prepared for their role and more comfortable within their role."

Parent Involvement

Parent/caregiver involvement with their children both in and out of schools has increased in most of the demonstration sites. Schools have been encouraged to involve parents, parents have been encouraged to become involved, and activities have been planned which facilitate parental involvement. Each FSC has encouraged parent-child interactions in a different manner. During home visits, all FSCs have provided activities for parents and children to do together, encouraged parents to record in-kind, and encouraged parents to become involved in the educational experiences of their children. For some parents/caregivers this meant helping children with their homework while for others it meant reading to the children, listening to the children read, hearing about the children's experiences in school, looking at the children's work that they had brought home from school, visiting schools, helping in classrooms, becoming involved in the schools' parent organizations, helping the children to do the food activities that they had learned in school, eating lunch with their children in school, sending treats to school, chaperoning classroom field trips, being guest speakers in the classrooms, serving as room parents, attending school-wide activities, and helping with classroom parties.

The lengthy list of activities illustrates how creative FSCs have been in their approaches. Family service coordinators never gave up when attendance at school activities was low or interest waned. They viewed low attendance as another challenge and thought of new ways to encourage parent-child interactions.

The "stories" of two parents help to illustrate how parent-child interactions have been increased for two different families. Margie has become involved in her son's education as a parent on the SDTP governing board and as an officer of the school's parent organization. Jackie has very little free time since she works full-time and has two very active children, but she still manages to be very involved with her children.

Margie's story. Margie is in her early thirties, does not work outside the home, and is very devoted to her family. Her oldest son, Mark, attends third grade in one of the demonstration school, and her younger son recently enrolled in kindergarten.

For Margie, the SDTP has been a way to become involved in the school. Since Mark is her oldest child, she had no previous experience with the school system as a parent. Mark's first grade was filled with problems. The teacher suggested that Mark had learning disabilities and that he spend time in the resource room. Margie's first reaction was one of surprise. She knew Mark was having trouble in school, but she did not think that it was that bad. Margie felt that somehow it was her fault that Mark needed help and that something was wrong with her. The FSC helped Margie understand learning disabilities and helped her communicate with the teacher. The FSC sat in on the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings as support for Margie. Margie was quite intimidated at first by both the school and the IEP meetings. The FSC encouraged Margie to assert her rights as a parent and to insist that the teachers and principal explain things to her in layman's terms.

Margie said:

> She [FSC] has even arranged meetings with me and the teacher so that I could talk and get it out....I have come a long way. Now the teachers know me and I have become an officer in the school's parent organization....now I try to get other parents interested in visiting school and joining the school organizations....It really helps with getting along with the teachers and the principal....It also helps to have other parents to talk to about school. You have to have someone that you can talk to and know that you're not the only one having problems with the school or your kids. It is important so that you don't feel like you're alone.

Margie does not particularly like to record in-kind, but she finds that doing so helps her to remember how important it is to spend time with her children. Margie said, "Mark even helps! Last night he brought a game to me and asked me to play it with him. He said that it would be a good activity for us so I could write it down! Kids catch on fast!"

Margie usually sits down every night to talk to Mark's about his day in school. She discovered that by listening closely to Mark's stories that he will tell her more about school. Mark enjoys talking about what he did and showing her the things that he brings home. Mark also loves to have Margie visit school and help in the classroom. "I think it makes him feel important," said Margie. At first, the teacher just "let me cut stuff out of paper," but as the year progressed the teacher let Margie work with the children. Mark's self-esteem has improved and Margie thinks that

the SDTP has a lot to do with that. She has learned how important it is to do things with her children. Margie said, "Never knew it was so important to be involved with your kids. My Mom had eight kids, so we had to help each other or fend for ourselves."

Jackie's story. Jackie is in her middle forties. She and her husband both attended college, and they waited ten years after their marriage before starting a family. Their two daughters attend one of the demonstration schools, Monica is in third grade. Jackie and her husband own a business, which keeps them both very busy. Jackie's daughters are very bright students and a "joy to have in the classroom," according to the teachers.

Although it would seem that a family like Jackie's would have little use for the SDTP, Jackie is quite supportive of it. She says that by filling out the monthly in-kind sheets she learns:

> Yes, I am involved with my kids. It helps the guilt. I have so little time to spend with them, but when I fill out the in-kind at the end of the month I learn that we have been doing quite a lot together....It helps me be accountable for what I have done with my children....Last year we made stone soup together once a week....I keep all the recipes for the food activities in school.

Jackie enjoys going to the school to have lunch with her daughters. The SDTP began this activity to help encourage parents to visit the school. The FSCs usually hold a parent meeting after the lunch. This past year the FSCs offered a parenting class after the noon lunch. Jackie was one of many parents who took the

time to attend the parenting class. It was not uncommon for many of the parents to visit the classrooms or help in the classrooms after the noon lunch and parent meeting. Jackie's schedule did not permit that, but she did enjoy having lunch with Monica and her other daughter. Jackie was glad that parenting meetings and parenting classes were offered at noon. She said, "We don't go out at night. That is the only time our family can be together....no matter how wonderful the program, we will say 'no' 95% of the time."

Jackie was asked by the classroom teacher to present material from her work. Jackie enjoyed that and does "behind the scenes" classroom work for Monica's teacher. An example of one of the things Jackie may do is to arrange a special presentation by a prominent guest lecturer.

Jackie's view of the SDTP is that by the school having this sort of program it is a very proactive way for the school to say, "We care. We care enough to send someone to your home to give this extra support and that says more than a nicely written newsletter."

Common Themes

Three common and interrelated themes emerge in the "stories" and in the data: (a) creative, (b) flexible, and (c) persistent. Family service coordinators are creative in their approaches to implementing the SDTP and in solving low attendance problems at parent meetings and parenting classes. Parent/caregiver attendance and parent-child interactions are increased by having the parent meetings scheduled at different times of the day, combining the parent meetings

with other school activities, having children put on presentations at the parent meetings, offering transportation to and from the parent meetings and parenting classes, offering child-care at the parent meetings and parenting classes, and including children in the parent meetings.

Being flexible is a consistent and shared goal of FSCs. Family service coordinators are flexible both in implementing the SDTP and in scheduling SDTP component activities:

1. Parenting classes are offered at different times of the day in some of the sites and during home visits on a one-on-one basis in other sites.

2. The FSCs give the parenting videos to the parents to watch at home if the parents/caregivers are unable to attend the parenting classes.

3. The 1-2-3 Magic parenting handbook was given to all the parents/caregivers during the 1996-1997 school year whether they attended the parenting classes or not.

Family service coordinators are persistent in their efforts to increase and improve parent-child interactions. The persistence is defined differently by each FSC. To some FSCs it means that the parents "need extra support" and maybe even "outside support" (such as counseling) to enhance parent-child interactions. To other coordinators the persistence means "continually trying new approaches or methods" to increase interactions. To another FSC, persistence means:

> When life gives you lemons, you make lemonade....in other words, you try to turn a bad situation into something good. You keep trying until something

works and then....you never quit trying. If Plan A doesn't work you go to Plan B, or Plan C, etc. We will try almost anything.

Summary

Family service coordinators are persistent in their use of creative and flexible strategies to increase and improve parent-child interactions. They offer parenting education to improve child-parent communication and encourage various parent/caregiver and child interactions. A sample list of activities which they encourage includes the following:

1. helping children with their homework,
2. reading to the children or listening to the children read,
3. hearing about the children's experiences in school,
4. looking at the children's work that they bring home from school,
5. visiting schools,
6. helping in classrooms,
7. becoming involved in the schools' parent organizations,
8. doing activities together such as the food activities,
9. eating lunch with their children in school,
10. sending treats to school,
11. chaperoning classroom field trips,
12. being guest speakers in the classrooms,
13. serving as room parents, and
14. attending school-wide activities.

Discussion

Family service coordinators have increased and improved parent and child interactions through creative, flexible, and persistent efforts. Each site uses the implementation methods which are most suited to its population. The method chosen depends to a large extent on the characteristics of the communities, families, FSCs, and schools. Some sites have increased attendance at parenting classes, because the classes are offered at the schools after the parents have eaten lunch with their children. Other sites have increased attendance at parent meetings and classes, because the meetings and classes are combined with presentations by the children. In one of the other sites parenting classes are offered in the homes on a one-on-one basis.

The "stories" of the parents demonstrated how communication has improved between the parents and the children after the parents attended the parenting classes and changed parenting practices. Parents who became more democratic in their parenting styles learned that the children were more willing to talk to the parents and to trust them. Since research suggests that democratic parenting styles are important to children's competence and achievement in school, the children in the SDTP should have increased chances for academic success (Brosz, 1988; Dekovic & Janssens, 1992; Gleason, 1993; Grolnick & Ryan, 1989; Pizzo, 1993; Waugh et al., 1993).

The "stories" of the four parents also demonstrated how parents have become more actively involved in the educational experiences of their children both at

home and at school. The children enjoyed having their parents visit school and especially enjoyed having their parents help in the classroom. The literature supports parent participation in children's education as important for children's academic achievement (Epstein, 1995; Funk & Brown, 1996; Griffith, 1996; Huffman et al., 1996; Keith et al., 1996; Mantzicopoulos & Neuharth-Pritchett, 1996; Moore & Brown, 1996; National Education Goals Panel, 1995; Rogers Tracy, 1995; Rosenthal & Young Sawyers, 1996; Sanders, 1996; Thompson, 1996; Vacha & McLaughlin, 1992; Vickers, 1994; Zeldin, 1990). We can assume that the results of the increased and improved participation by SDTP parents will be greater academic achievement for the children.

Implications for Families, Practitioners, and Policy Makers

As stated earlier, communication between children and parents and parents' involvement in the education of their children have improved after implementation of the SDTP. Improved communication and increased parent/caregiver involvement should improve children's educational success and ultimately their life chances.

Understanding the perceptions of parents/caregivers will help researchers, practitioners, and policy makers interpret SDTP implementation results, problems, and provide suggestions for future programs. Learning what the context of SDTP has meant to parents/caregivers is fundamentally important to all SDTP participants.

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